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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1806  
INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY  
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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 01014

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
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SUBJECT: HIZBALLAH ON THE MOVE

1. C-ENTIRE TEXT.

2. BEGIN SUMMARY: SOME WEEKS AGO, IN A MESSAGE ON POTENTIAL NEW HIZBALLAH TACTICS IN THE WAKE OF THE JENCO KIDNAPPING AND THE MURDER OF TWO FRENCH MILITARY OBSERVERS, EMBASSY BEIRUT SPECULATED THAT HIZBALLAH IS BEGINNING TO SHIFT TOWARD A MORE PUBLIC, VISIBLE STANCE, PARTLY BECAUSE WE THOUGHT THEY FELT STRONG ENOUGH. WE NOW HAVE MORE EVIDENCE OF THIS. FIRST, ON FEBRUARY 16 HIZBALLAH ISSUED ITS FIRST PUBLIC PROGRAMMATIC MANIFESTO (BEIRUT 1013), INTER ALIA, CALLING FOR THE DEPARTURE OF THE US, FRANCE AND THEIR ALLIES FROM LEBANON AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ISLAMIC REGIME. SECOND, ON FEBRUARY 18, ARMED HIZBALLAH DEMONSTRATORS, VARIOUSLY NUMBERED AT 1500-12,000, WERE BUSSED TO SIDON FROM BEIRUT AND CONTROLLED THE CITY'S STREETS FOR A DAY AS ARMY STOOD BY. THIS WAS AN OMINOUS DEMONSTRATION OF STRENGTH AND WILL AND ABILITY TO ACT THAT WILL SHARPEN EXISTING BATTLE LINES AND TENSIONS IN LEBANON. END SUMMARY.

3. BUSLOADS OF HEAVILY ARMED HIZBALLAH DEMONSTRATORS, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN AND ESTIMATED BY WESTERN NEWS AGENCIES TO NUMBER 1500-12,000, DROVE FROM BEIRUT TO SIDON ON FEBRUARY 18 TO MARCH THROUGH CITY STREETS, BURNING THE LEBANESE FLAG AND SHOUTING SLOGANS AGAINST PRESIDENT GEMAYEL. SOME 20 SHOPS SELLING ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES WERE SACKED. AS SIDON RESIDENTS AND LAF TROOPS LOOKED ON WITHOUT INTERVENING, DEMONSTRATORS ARMED WITH AK-47S AND ROCKET-PROPELLED GRENADES RALLIED IN CITY SQUARES, SHOUTING SLOGANS SUCH AS "DEATH TO GEMAYEL," "SIDON IS MUSLIM AND CANNOT BE RULED BY A MARONITE," AND "GEMAYEL IS AN AGENT." DEMONSTRATORS WAVED IRANIAN AND HIZBALLAH FLAGS AND CARRIED PICTURES OF AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI. A SMALLER GROUP OF AMAL MEMBERS CONDUCTED THEIR OWN DEMONSTRATION SEPARATE FROM THAT OF HIZBALLAH. (AMAL LATER ISSUED A STATEMENT DENOUNCING THE HIZBALLAH RALLIES AND CONDEMNING THE VIOLENCE.)

4. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, AT THE ARMY CHECKPOINT AT KHALDE, LAF TROOPS CHEERED AND WAVED THE BUS CONVOY THROUGH, WHILE PSP MILITIAMEN FURTHER SOUTH ALSO WELCOMED IT.

5. IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DAILY STAR, SIDON DEPUTY NAZIH BIZRI, A SUNNI, EXPRESSED DISMAY THAT THE MILITIAMEN IGNORED THE AGREEMENT REACHED BY SIDON'S LEADERS NOT TO ALLOW THE BEARING OF ARMS IN THE CITY. HE SAID THAT THE PEOPLE OF SIDON WERE CROSS AND ANGRY, BUT THAT THE INCIDENT WILL NOT SPOIL THE UNITY OF THE CITY. HE SAID THAT THE ARMY DID NOT INTERVENE IN ORDER NOT TO PROVOKE A CLASH. ON MONDAY, A GROUP OF SIDON SUNNI NOTABLES ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE CONDEMNING MONDAY'S "ARMED AND MASSIVE" DEMONSTRATION. "WE WILL NOT ALLOW ANYONE, REGARDLESS OF FACTION, TO VIOLATE THE DECISION TO BAN ARMS FROM THE LIBERATED CITY, OTHER THAN THOSE OF THE ARMY AND THE ISF."

6. COMMENT: THE FEBRUARY 16 MANIFESTO AND MONDAY'S DEMONSTRATION MARK A NEW STEP BY HIZBALLAH TOWARDS BECOMING AN ACTIVE POLITICAL MOVEMENT OVERTLY DECLARING AND PURSUING ITS GOAL OF THE ISLAMICIZATION OF LEBANON. AT A MINIMUM, THIS MEANS THAT THE TENSIONS AND BATTLE LINES AMONG COMPETING FORCES IN LEBANON WILL BE MUCH MORE SHARPLY DRAWN:

1A. WITHIN THE SHIA COMMUNITY. THE MONDAY DEMONSTRATIONS PROVIDED GRAPHIC EVIDENCE OF AMAL-HIZBALLAH RIVALRY. PRESS REPORTS SPOKE OF EVIDENT DISPLEASURE ON THE PART OF AMAL DEMONSTRATORS, WHILE AMAL'S LATER DENUNCIATION OF THE DEMONSTRATION IS THE FIRST EXPLICIT DISAPPROVAL OF THIS TYPE THAT WE CAN RECALL. MOREOVER, HIZBALLAH HAS CLEARLY MARKED OUT ITS FUTURE POLITICAL IDENTITY IN LEBANON--IN THE SIDON RALLIES, ITS SLOGANS SUPPORTING AN ISLAMIC REPUBLIC TOOK PRIDE OF PLACE OVER AMAL'S CALLS FOR THROWING THE ISRAELIS OUT OF THE SOUTH.

1B. SUNNI-SHIA. HIZBALLAH'S RALLY IN THE VERY HEART OF THE SUNNI CAPITAL OF THE SOUTH RECALLS THE WORST FEARS OF THE SUNNIS, AS EVIDENCED BY THEIR COMMUNIQUE. IN FURTHER SUNNI REACTION, A DELEGATION FROM THE SUNNI CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION MAQASSAD (WHICH IS HEADED BY SAIB SALAM'S SON TAMAM) IS TRAVELLING TO SIDON ON TUESDAY IN THE WAKE OF REPORTS THAT A PTT EMPLOYEE HAS BEEN KILLED BY ARMED MEN NEWLY APPEARING ON CITY STREETS.

1C. THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. THE MONDAY DEMONSTRATIONS WILL ALSO EVOKE THE WORST FEARS OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, FURTHER PROVOKING A DEFENSIVE, SEIGE MENTALITY AND PUTTING MORE OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS. WE ARE STRUCK, FOR EXAMPLE, BY HIZBALLAH'S SINGLING OUT THE PHALANGE IN ITS WEEKEND COMMUNIQUE AND BY ITS ATTACKS ON GEMAYEL. THIS, TOGETHER WITH JUMBLATT'S HEATED RHETORIC AGAINST THE REGIME AND MIMICKING OF THE ISLAMIC CAUSE OVER THE WEEKEND (BEIRUT 0993), WILL HARDLY ENCOURAGE ANY CHRISTIAN TENDENCIES TOWARD FLEXIBILITY.

1D. SECURITY AND THE ROLE OF THE ARMY. THE LIMP AND EVEN HARMFUL PERFORMANCE OF THE ARMY ON MONDAY HAS ABRUPTLY NULLIFIED THE EUPHORIA OF THE SIDON CITIZENRY AS A RESULT OF THE LAF'S TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO THE CITY ON SATURDAY. PRECISELY WHEN IT WAS EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN ORDER AND TO SUPPORT SIDON NOTABLES' CALLS FOR "DISARMAMENT," THE LAF FAILED ITS FIRST, AND PERHAPS MOST CRUCIAL, TEST.

17. IN ONE SENSE, IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT THE MORE HIZBALLAH COMES OUT OF THE WOODWORK AND BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN, THE BETTER THE SITUATION IS IN TERMS OF GALVANIZING BARRI (WHOM WE HAVE BEEN WARNING ON THIS VERY TOPIC FOR SOME TIME) AND THE SUNNIS, AT LEAST IN SIDON. ONE THING IS CLEAR: FEW LEBANESE OF ANY COMMUNITY OR PERSUASION WANT TO LIVE IN AN ISLAMIC REPUBLIC. (THE BULK OF THE SHIA DO NOT FOLLOW THIS LINE YET, ALTHOUGH IT MAY HAVE CONSIDERABLE LATENT STRENGTH.) IN ANY EVENT, ON THIS POINT, THERE IS A TIE THAT BINDS THE GREAT MAJORITY OF MUSLIMS TO THE GREAT MAJORITY OF CHRISTIANS. ACCORDINGLY, IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO FIND A BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM COOPERATION IN MEETING A THREAT TO ALL OF THEM WHICH IS GREATER THAN ANY DIFFERENCES THAT MAY SEPARATE THEM. THEN AGAIN, THIS IS LEBANON. IN ANY CASE, WE WILL BE CLOSELY TRACKING THE REACTION TO THE SIDON DEMONSTRATIONS, PARTICULARLY ON THE PART OF THE MODERATE SHIAS.

BARTHOLOMEW